Up On The White Thistle Hill

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/27015916.

Rating:	Not Rated
Archive Warning:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationship:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter
Characters:	Francis Dolarhyde (mentioned), Jack Crawford (mentioned), Retired Assassin!Will, Assassin!Hannibal - Character, Sleeping Beauty!Hannibal (Kind of)
Additional Tags:	Magic Realism, Angst with a Happy Ending, Implied/Referenced Character Death, author was drunk, No Beta, Canon-Typical Behavior, Witness how i wrote a tragedy and try to undo it
Language:	English
Series:	Part 9 of October Writing Experiments 2020 👁👄👁
Stats:	Published: 2020-10-14 Words: 2,746 Chapters: 1/1

Up On The White Thistle Hill

by celestialcello

Summary

‘You can choose to not believe me but I still feel like it’s something I need to tell you, Mr. Graham,’ Mrs. Robinson continued, wrangling her hands together until her knuckles turned white, ‘Perhaps you have seen the hills at the other side of the lake?’

‘I have certainly noticed them. Why, Mrs. Robinson? Is there something special about them?’

She produced a poorly feigned, nervous chuckle at the question, eyes drifting involuntarily towards the window in the living room.

‘It’s a bit silly, perhaps. But these hills, we call them White Thistle Hill. If you plan to sail or hike there… Actually, please definitely do, the view is simply breathtaking at this time of the year. But do come back before sunset. Otherwise , well, they say you will be lost to the other side of the hill and can never come back.’

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

~*~

After fulfilling his last contract in Tuscany, Will Graham retired at the age of 40. His name would be whispered in darkness for years to come with awe and fear. No one believed that he would have come out of it alive. No one could believe what he had done.

He signed the papers, took the money and settled down in a house in Maine.

The first day he moved into the two-storey hut beside the lake after his retirement, his only neighbour within the three-mile radius came up his driveway at midday, a certain Mrs. Robinson. She was already in her forties, slender and tall with nervous fingers. Her visit was accompanied by rather generous gift basket with jam, biscuits, and coffee. She politely refused Will's offer for a cup of tea.

'I really must go. It's been great, to have you move in here, Mr. Graham. It's just…'

'What is it?' Will studied her lingering figure beside the door, sensing the unusual hesitance in the woman's voice. To be fair, the visit has been strange to begin with. There weren't many who would be this eager to meet a distant neighbour, especially that when he purchased the property, he had specifically had the agent promise that it would not be those non-sense community councils and seasonal parties ranging from Halloween to Christmas.

'You can choose to not believe me but I still feel like it's something I need to tell you, Mr. Graham,' Mrs. Robinson continued, wrangling her hands together until her knuckles turned white, 'Perhaps you have seen the hills at the other side of the lake?'

'I have certainly noticed them. Why, Mrs. Robinson? Is there something special about them?'

She produced a poorly feigned, nervous chuckle at the question, eyes drifting involuntarily towards the window in the living room.

'It's a bit silly, perhaps. But these hills, we call them White Thistle Hill. If you plan to sail or hike there… Actually, please definitely do, the view is simply breathtaking at this time of the year. But do come back before sunset. Otherwise , well, they say you will be lost to the other side of the hill and can never come back.'

Will smiled at the beautiful idea of there being something worth coming back for in this world. And however Mrs. Robinson chose to interpret the look, she was certainly not offended. She continued.

'You see, Mr. Graham. As children some of us have imaginary friends, right? But even now I still have the feeling that Gabbie was… Not just my imagination. A long time ago, the last time I went up those hills, Gabbie stayed behind to chase a herd of fireflies and would not come back with me even when I begged her. And for the last thirty-or-so years of my life, people have been telling me there had never been a Gabbie Hurston. In fact, there had never been the Hurstons at all…'

Her tone was stretching thinner and sharper until it hit an abrupt stop when she realised that she had divulged too much information to a stranger. Mrs. Robinson appeared confused for a second, which she wouldn't have if she could know how many other people had trusted more dangerous secrets with Will in more or less similar fashion. Will observed the minute shift in her body language intently: tightened lips and hunched shoulders, signs that she was trying to close herself off from the conversation.

'I will bear that in mind, Mrs. Robinson, thank you. Some day, when you have time, I would love to have you and your family over.' Wearing a sincere look, Will went up to the trembling woman and offered his hand. They shook once, and Mrs. Robinson visibly relaxed.

'Of course, I mean, absolutely, Mr. Graham. I have left the phone number to our house with the basket. Once you have settled in, or if you need any help, just give us a call. Both me and my wife work from home so it would alway be either one of us on the other end. It's been lovely meeting you.'

'Likewise. Take care, Mrs. Robinson.'

'You too. And… Be careful when you go up the White Thistle Hill.'

~*~

When Mrs. Robinson left (he didn't even bother to ask for her first name, as things have turned out), Will laughed, and laughed until his lungs were drained of air and everything around him blurred into sharp fragments of white. He thought he was going to cry but no tear came out of the drought that was his eyes.

'*Your eyes are the sea set ablaze by a storm that was about to come. They are beautiful.'*
'Have you seen the sea before, Hannibal?'

'I have, when I saw you the first time. And one day, I promise you, we will go to the sea.'

'Are we even capable of promise?'

'The last thing we could have is hope. Be hopeful, Will.'

That conversation took place five summers ago, in a hotel room in Madrid where they had left the window open because there was nothing to be afraid of for people like them. They lied together, skin against naked skin, tangled limbs, touching foreheads. Their breath mingling into words and adoration. From a far the sea crashed against the tall cliffs and humid air, sending winds above them.

Will leaned down to explore the bullet scar on Hannibal's abdomen - the one left by him on their first encounter. In return of the favour, the other man pulled him up and bite down recently healed stab on Will's shoulder, and he sighed to the dull pain the the humid warmth of his lover's tongue.

At that moment, the only thing he could think of was that how they must have been in love the whole life they had known each other. The cruel years in an orphanage off the coast of

Svalbard on the merciless Arctic Sea; how they pinned each other down on the training mat, on the frozen earth with burning red cheeks and excited breath. The time when they fought together for their chance to leave the world of endless snow and ice. The years of separations and hollowness that followed when they were lead onto two different planes on a windy airfield, refusing to unlock their fingers until guns were pointed against their heads.

And then the joy of reconciliation. His heart was placed back inside the boundless darkness inside his chest. And when he felt Hannibal's tears on the nape of his shoulder, Will knew that he was seeing the same thing, too.

'I will never let us be separated again.'

'Neither will I let you go.'

~*~

Two summers ago, an early morning, he was brewing coffee in their kitchen when he suddenly broke down in an agonising pain that seemed to be screaming from the very core of his being.

'Sometimes I feel like I love you enough such that if something happens, I would know. Because you would find a way to me.'

Hannibal laid down their breakfast, protein scramble with sausage, onion and mushroom, and raised his eyebrow at Will's latest declaration.

'That sounds ominous. But save it for another time, this contract is hardly that risky.'

He held his hands in a reassuring grasp over the table and kissed his knuckles.

And then for the next two years of his life, Will hoped that he had never released those hands. He wished that time had stopped that morning when Hannibal insisted on helping him with the dishes. He wished that he had packed an extra magazine or knife for him, *he wished, he wished, he wished* -

When Jack Crawford showed up at his doorstep in the afternoon, Will listened impassively as Jack told him that Hannibal has been missing for the last 48 hours, and then shot the man in between his eyebrows.

~*~

Rumours has it, that when the contractor examined the body of Francis Dolarhyde the Great Red Dragon, his heart was missing from the brutally wrenched open chest.
Some believed that Graham ate it raw. Others say that it was with a fine glass of wine and some fava beans.

‘It has to be a Chianti,’ Freddie Lounds in the Customer Service department vouched, ‘You know the tale of Lecter torturing the poor Italian child trafficker because he wouldn’t tell him the passcode to his cellar.’

~*~

45°14'46.6”N, 67°59'34.2”W. The place where Hannibal was killed, potentially. Dolarhyde told Will before he could gut the man open like a pig. His men spent three days in a place named Whilte Thistle Hill in Maine looking for Lecter’s body after he was shot three times. They never managed to find him, but no one could survive three .308 150-GR Noslers - those used for deer stalking.

Sometimes Will believed that it was at that moment he made up his mind of digging out Dolarhyde’s heart while the man was still breathing. He has never been as cruel, yet this beast hunted the love of his life down as if Hannibal were a sport, how cold, how despicable.

He devoured the heart raw while he cried. He cried because he could never make the perpetrator suffer as much as he deserved, he cried because Hannibal was never going to come back to life even when he swallowed down the blood of his murderer.

~*~

By early afternoon, Will slumbered into an alcohol-induced sleep on the couch among half-unpacked cardboard boxes.

The sun was sinking into the lake in the last sign of its glory, the water shone like solid mercuries, the waves scales of an unnamed creature from the sea. They were sitting on the Other Side of the White Thistle Hill. They were surrounded in the forests of snow-like crowns of the grass, stretching miles and miles until the end where the land was melded together with the sky. The water has risen to their knees.

‘I couldn’t bring you back. I couldn’t save you from that day when you died among the white thistles in the late summer. All I wanted now was to find your bones among the earth.’

He was laying on his lover’s knee again, feeling those cold fingers among his hair, traipsing over his newly acquired scar on the forehead. Will looked up at him, and was still mesmerised by its unsettling, sharp beauties like the first time he looked at Hannibal as a teenager at the other end of the long, barren dining table lit by the macabre oil lamps burning whale fat.

‘Don’t be too harsh on yourself, Will. Such was fate. And we were guilty in the same way, if you insist on this. Every night since then all I could do was holding you until the sun rises again, never could I again reach for you in the light.’

‘You speak like how I imagined you would, which is a good thing, I guess.’

‘The mortal concept of life and death is, as I have discovered, so very limited, Will. Yet at the moment I could not seem to find a way to dissuade you from your sorrow.’

‘You can’t. You are a phantom of my imagination, Hannibal. You are so real because there is nothing left worthy to be remembered except shadow of you. And because I was drunk before I went to bed.’

‘Will,’ Hannibal chided. Will remembered the quiet pride when Hannibal showed him his certificate from the John Hopkins. He remembered how he mocked Hannibal for learning how to save lives while they had been doing the exact opposite for their whole life. He remembered pouncing at the man and being held into a firm, warm embrace.

‘I know it kills my liver and kidney. But the sooner I can get there, the sooner I can see you, I suppose? Not like either of us would end up in heaven after all.’

Suddenly his lover’s hand tightened on on his shoulder, and Will allowed himself to be help up. He looked into the strange crimson eyes of Hannibal under the unnatural light, and could not do anything but reach over to touch them.

‘You are still the only thing I could see with absolute clarity, even now, Hannibal.’

He watched blood-like tears trickled down Hannibal’s pale skin. He remembered all the marble statues of Crete and of Athens lined along the intricate hallway of the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, and believed that this was how they would loo like if they too bore the platinum hair and soft lips.

‘I am at the other side of the White Thistle Hill. But you don’t have to come here, Will. You could have been patient, because I would find you and come to you, no matter how long it takes.’ Hannibal took his face between his scarred, freezing palms, his tone urgent with a shaking voice.

‘Then I’ll find you, Hannibal.’

~*~

Weather was clearly not working in favour of him when he watched the lead-grey clouds threatening a storm over the lake. Will packed his bag with energy bars, electrolyte and a shovel, and untied the boat he inherited from the previous owner of the house that was rising and sinking with the uneven wave at the small private port. It was just over six according to his watch.

He reached the other end of the lake in just under an hour, soaked in the gloomy coldness of the lake and the unusually high waves. The hills loomed over like ancient mausoleum that has been excavated by wind and thunder.

When he looked up at the rising grasses, all he could see was miles and miles of white thistles, more than what he has ever seen in all the places he had travelled in light and in hiding. Like a veil of new snow seen in late summer, such scenes were either a miracle or an omen, by the common standard.

Will set up the portable GPS, and began the ascension along the seemingly benign slope, and the white grasses bend down in deference as he passed among them. Their thorns scratched against his bare hand and brushed pass his coats and cargo pants like a million fingers and bones under the glare of headlamp.

45°14'46.6”N, 67°59'34.2”W. Once he reached the coordinate, Will examined the ground covered in thick mosses and thickets for signs of a potential shallow grave, even though he knew it was a hopeless search after all the time. Pushing aside the tall grasses and low branches, all of a sudden he came onto an opening with no other plants other than the grass after which the mountain was named. Hundreds and thousands fireflies were drifting in uncertain patterns against the violet, starless night.

Will knew, at that moment. And he breached the hardened shell of mud and grass and went deeper and deeper down its cavity to free his lover. He could not remember for how long he repeated the mechanical motion - under the moonlight all concept of time dissolves into one homogenous sense of urgency. Yes, the moon had finally overcome the mountains of clouds and casted its speculative look down at the earth on which a pair of estranged lover lived and died together.

Eventually, he could not tell whether it was after minutes or hours, the same pale countenance he had only just seen again after years of insomnia emerged from its coffin of roots and mud. His skin was unmarred just like the marble statues unwatered from the cerulean Mediterranean, his cavities have not become the home to worms and ants. With shaking hands Will pulled him out of the grip of the Hill. He listened, and perhaps in hallucination and ecstasy, felt the weak yet incessant heartbeat confined within these chest. With a soft touch, Will swept away the last remnant of mud from Hannibal’s still eyelashes and soft hair. He laid him down among the susurrating white thistles.

He kissed his lover on those parched, pallid lips. And with a sigh, those eyes opened, casting maroon shadows into the thundering blue Hannibal once carved onto his bone. He saw his own tear at the corner of those eyes.

‘The earth would not claim me even after years. We are bound to be returned to each other.’

And Will believed him, on the last night of summer up on the White Thistle Hill.

End Notes

Thanks for reading❤️

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!